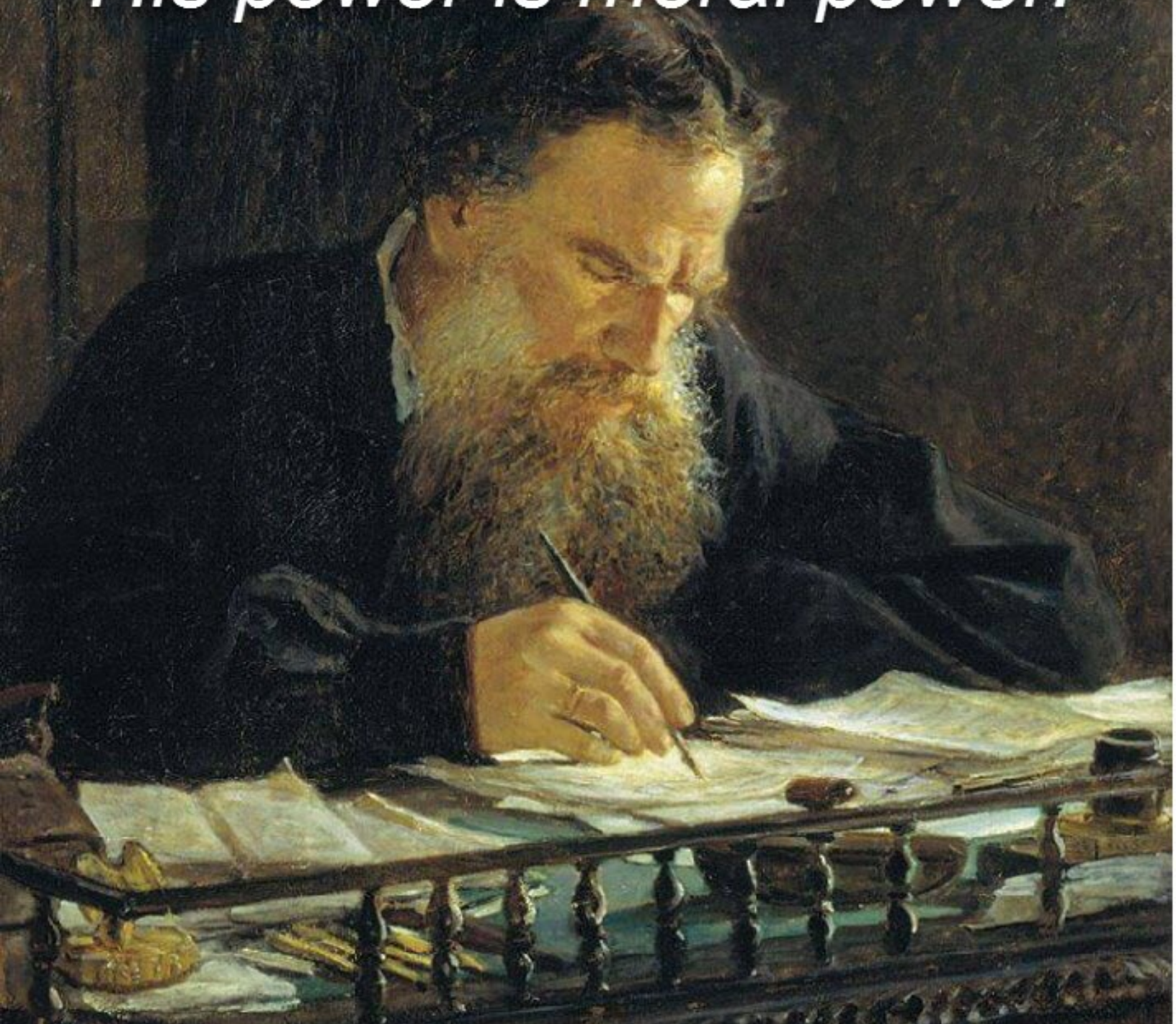


*He is the greatest power in
the world to-day.
His power is moral power.*



*- John C. Kenworthy about
Leo Tolstoy*

Leo Tolstoy

I

"Judge of a tree by its fruit." Looking backward through, history, along the line of the world's great names, whom do we see to have been the world's great benefactors? These: the men who have most deeply discerned, and most effectively conveyed to others, the truth of life. They are such as Lao-tze, Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Socrates, Jesus; from whom epochs are dated, and by whose teachings thousands of millions, age after age, suppose themselves to live.

And, indeed, it is by such men and their teachings that mankind do live; for these "prophets" reveal the ideal towards which those who come after them must necessarily strive, though it be through all manner of ignorance and hypocrisy. The sign of a prophet is that he, of all men, deals with the simple and vital questions of life which are every man's problem, and agitates, revolutionises, renews, society by his solutions. Only the ages that come after him can estimate the worth and power of a prophet, but even his own day can judge whether or not a man be a prophet. And all over the world, by the few who believe with him, by the many who reject him, by multitudes who cannot or will not understand him, it is felt and known that Leo Tolstoy, the Russian, is indeed a prophet, a revealer.

That spare, strong-looking old man with Socrates-like face and long grey hair and beard, who lives so quietly in Moscow or in the country near, it is not too much to say, is the greatest power in the world to-day.

"What," you ask, "the greatest power in the world?" And I answer, Yes. He is, for instance, the declared opponent of the wielders of the largest militarism in the world, and they do not dare to lay hands on him.

His power is moral power, his rule is the rule of ideas; the enlightened consciences of men everywhere are with him. The mere circulation of his writings evidences that there is no man living who is so dominant over the thoughts of men to-day; even his enemies are influenced and moved by him.

The prophet deals with the simple and vital questions of life which are every man's problem. And all these questions are, and for men in society always

have been, summed up in one the Social Question; the question, How shall we live in society? Even the matter of "personal salvation" is involved in this prior question. Our Christian religion declares this when it shows that salvation for the individual depends upon his obedience to the principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." All history, with its rise and fall of nations and states, growth and decay of religions, strifes for power and against oppression, pageantry and misery, war, murder, devotion and sacrifice all history may be best understood as the effort of humanity to rightly grasp in meaning and justly apply in practice, this great social principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The obvious and all-embracing practical implications of that principle are well expressed in that great cry of the French Revolution for "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." To be in order, however, with the instinctive working and historic progress of the mind of man, let us change the positions of the words, and say, "Equality, Fraternity, Liberty." Then, looking upon the social struggle that is rending civilisation through its foundations, we may detect the general and ancient movement towards Equality, growing and spreading under its present-day name of Socialism.

"Equality of opportunity" is the conscious demand of millions of people, revolted by experience of the inequality which gives the power of property, with leisure and luxury, to the rich, and slavery, overwork, and want to the poor.

Within this wide range of Socialism is a less wide but deeper movement, which has for its hope Fraternity.

Turning from the prevalent state of war open war of the battle-field, veiled war of armed peace, and trade war called competition, the conscience of man desires even more than equality of opportunity, namely, co-operation, brotherly treatment of man by man. Communism, the movement arising hence is called.

And yet again, within these others is a less wide, still deeper movement, for Liberty. Men ask, "What restrains us from Equality and Fraternity?" And the answer is given, "An evil principle, accepted as right in theory, and applied ruthlessly in social practice; the principle, namely, that it is right and necessary for some men to rule others by force, by law which rests on

armed violence, military power.” Those who give this answer are called Anarchists,¹ and their movement, Anarchy or Anarchism. The complete Anarchist is the perfect idealist; the man whose goal is entire freedom of action for all, knowing this to be the only possible condition in which equality and fraternity can exist. And this perfect freedom is seen to be compatible only with a perfect morality.

The true place and power of Tolstoy are not to be appreciated by those who are unaware of the vast area and true nature of all this social movement.

Those who limit their thought and outlook to newspapers and novels, Piccadilly and Parliament, the office and the suburban residence, the factory and the beer shop, must necessarily remain unaware of what and where the heart and brain of the social body are prompting and leading. To them, Socialism is today's craze of the unavoidable percentage of fanatics in society, Communism is folly, Anarchism is crime, Tolstoy is a dim vague figure of genius, very noble (no doubt), but not to be taken seriously, a little mad; they do not, they cannot, know that they themselves are the dullards, the deadweights of humanity; that the Social Movement is of men, better and wiser than they, whose foremost prophet is Tolstoy, a prophet of the ages. This man, who acts and speaks so peaceably in the name of the Christ, has practised and taught the last doctrines of Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, and finds them summed up in the rediscovered Gospel.

II

Our British “piety” has, on the whole, felt itself compelled to reverence the pure teaching and consistent life of Tolstoy. But the more it has spoken this reverence, the more it has rejected his doctrine. A first reason given for this rejection is that Tolstoy's teaching and example are a natural product of Russia, but do not apply in England. To at all benefit from Tolstoy, this illusion must be taken for what it is, and put aside. As far as any matter of Christian principle goes, the conditions of life are the same in Russia as in England. In both countries men need food, clothing and shelter, which need hand-and-head labour to produce. In both countries men buy and sell in the same way, hold property by similar laws; they put the same power of government in control of society, with emperor or queen at the head, with supporting legislative councils and parliaments, law-courts and judges, tax-

gatherers and officials, police, army and navy. In both countries an orthodox religion prevails, which approves the system of government, declares the existing state of things to be the will of God, and discountenances change.

It is hard to persuade the mass of people, to whom the foreigner remains so very foreign, of the identity of life, in all but some superficial aspects, in all civilized countries. The slight dissimilarities between English and Russian habits must be understood and seen in their proper proportions to the whole of life, and Tolstoy will then be read in England as a man appealing equally to all men. And we must come to see that the ballot, absence of a literary censorship, freedom of speech, and voluntarism in the army, have not created different issues of life for Englishmen and Russians.

A difference that has importance, lies in the fact that while in Russia over eighty per cent, of the people are peasant-agriculturists, and the rest are city-dwellers and the rich, in England eighty per cent, are of the town, and the rest are of the country. On their great plains, amid their forests, the Russians are nearer nature than we, and therefore simpler in habit and thought. The opposition of the two classes, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, is more readily seen in such a society than in ours, where the middle classes break the contrast. This character of the national life about him has undoubtedly given a certain shape and quality to Tolstoy's work; it has also helped him to that searching simplicity and directness which is more difficult to attain in the greater complication and confusion of our western life.

The Tolstoy family is of high aristocracy, dating from Peter the Great's time. On his mother's side, Leo Tolstoy has for ancestor a Prince of Montenegro, whom he is said to greatly resemble in feature. The principal estate of the family is at Yasnaya Polyana, eighty miles or thereabout south from Moscow, and near Tula. There Leo Tolstoy (who, as every one knows, is hereditarily a Count) was born, now sixty-nine years ago, on 28th August, 1828. To understand his childhood one must read *Boyhood* (otherwise known in English as *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*) written by him in his early twenties; not actually, but essentially, this book is autobiography, as is so much in his other stories and novels. Let us at once remark that Tolstoy's method and power consist in entire devotion to truth in life and nature; this

devotion, born in him as a master-impulse, having been consciously adopted and followed from reading Rousseau in his youth. It results that, of all writers, Tolstoy is the most consistently self-revealing; and one will in vain seek through literature for such another record of the gradual, inevitable, convincing, illuminating, unfoldment of a soul, as the record he has given us. He is Rousseau with a difference; difference of the age, and of his own superior spirituality.

The age has led him to apply to human life the accurate method applied by science to physical nature; his spirituality has enabled him to enter the sphere and proclaim the realities of the spirit.

His early years, spent out on those great plains, among rich relations, servants and peasants, exercised the deep love of nature which informs all his writing.

Picture the "great estate" with its varied life of peasant and aristocrat; the expanses of sky, plain and forest; the mansion, and the wooden huts of the village; the idle pleasures of "the family," and the toil of the peasants. All these made the first deep impressions in the child's mind, and gave material for the work of the man. One need not enlarge upon this; it suffices to say that, amid these surroundings, he was a child, full of life and animation, deeply observant, in many ways extraordinarily, even awkwardly, sensitive, with a great power and habit of introspection the especially Russian faculty of "self-picking." It is said that in these early years his disposition towards goodness, rightness of life, was shown in such ways as the keeping of a diary to note his faults and guide him in their correction.

In his teens he saw something of life in Moscow, that city, half a capital; and was entered at the Kazan University. There he learned what he chose, and no more; consequently, from a professorial point of view, his career was not distinguished. However, he unquestionably took thence much of his own choosing; for instance, "At eighteen I became a freethinker," he says. The easy, indifferent, and in the fullest sense immoral, life of his class, and the evident absence of reality in the profession and teaching of religion around him, thus early produced their effect, inevitable with a sincere and well-disposed mind. At about twenty he entered the army, and while with his brother serving against the tribes of the Caucasus, he wrote the pieces

which compose Boyhood. At twenty-six he was in the Crimea serving against the allies. His great talent and liveliness wrought upon all about him; his sayings "went the round," and a song of his was sung by the whole army. But his real employment then was to gather from experience data for his last, ripe teaching upon the world-crime of war. Not yet seeing clearly, still his book of the period, Sevastopol, is so simple, so thrilling, so obviously matter-of-fact, that it is in itself sufficient to turn one from war for ever. The Tsar, hearing something of what Tolstoy was doing, had the promising author taken from danger and put to serve in a place of safety.

And now let me direct attention to a second "criticism" of Tolstoy, put up as a defence against the power of his doctrine. The first criticism, which sets up an assumed essential difference between life in England and in Russia, may be termed feeble; this second criticism can only be termed base. It is, that Tolstoy is a reformed libertine, one who in his age repents the crimes of his youth and manhood in order to gain heaven. "The excesses of his youth have produced old-age asceticism in him," is said in so many words. (And the people who so speak are nearly always ready to call Tolstoy "saint" and "prophet," while they say, "We need not follow his exaggerations"; they forget, or will not see, that those so-called "exaggerations" make him precisely what he is, and distinguish him from them, who do not wish or who fear to be "saints" and "prophets.") That a man's past affects his present is a truism. But is John Bunyan less true in his Puritan Evangel, because of his bitterly-repentant evil youth? Is Francis of Assisi less holy in life because of his bitterly-repentant first manhood? Is Paul less a Christian because he first murdered Christians? And, in any case, it is not to his own personal worth that Tolstoy calls our attention; but to solid reasons, actual experiences, verifiable truths, which, once discovered, are, and must be, the same for all human perception, whatever the individual's past may be.

This accusation against Tolstoy is the echo of his own declaration in *My Confession*, a book which, truly read, yields the key to his life. His words are:

"I put men to death in war, I fought duels to slay others, I lost at cards, wasted my substance wrung from the sweat of peasants, punished the latter cruelly, rioted with loose women, and deceived men. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, and murder, all committed by

me, not one crime omitted, and -“

His accusers omit what follows:

"Yet I was not the less considered by my equals a comparatively moral man. Such was my life during ten years."

He speaks of his early manhood. We are apt to forget that he accuses himself of living as the great majority of our own English army officers and fashionable men are accustomed to live indeed, he says, he lived not quite so badly as his class. Tolstoy tells us of his early desire for virtue, his struggles for virtue, the laughter and opposition he met, the applause he found for his evil deeds; "not one word was spoken, not a finger lifted, to help." All his books are the faithful record of that struggle, thus early begun, and of his errors and his attainment. It is not well to speak of him as has been done. Those who know him as he is can gauge the shallowness of the accusers.²

III

Living between Moscow and St. Petersburg, moving in fashionable, literary, and generally "cultured" (as it is called) society, and travelling abroad occasionally, Tolstoy's fame as a writer grew. Though he more and more felt himself to be without any certain guidance in life, still his writings ("studies by the way," these earlier pieces may be called) show more and more of large purpose, seriousness, and moral direction.

Albert, Lucerne, The Two Hussars, A Russian Proprietor, exhibit this growth.

At last he married the daughter of a German physician in Moscow. The courtship is told as that of Kitty and Levine in "Anna Karenina; "the history of Levine in that story being Tolstoy's own history up to this period of his life. Now thirty-four years old, he settled at Yasnaya Polyana, and the course of his life for fifteen years may be briefly described.

He managed his estates and increased their value and income; sought to improve the condition of the peasants; experimented with schools for his peasants and their children; wrote largely of these labours and the novel ideas and principles he discovered and applied; became known as "a practical philanthropist," his writings upon the children's schools, which he

practically yielded to the children to conduct in their own way, being found especially interesting and useful; gave himself heartily to the large family of sons and daughters which grew up to him. And all this while he laboured in succession upon the great novels, War and Peace and Anna Karenina.

Tolstoy now desires no one to read those books, though they contain the germs of all he has since developed. The material for his argument upon life is gathered there, but the all-important conclusions are wanting. If I now dwell upon these works it is only briefly to affirm the qualities of the writer discovered in them; qualities attested by the criticism, not of one circle or one country, but of all circles and countries. The note of all criticism of Tolstoy is that "his novels are life itself." In other writers one may find colour and distortion of the medium; in Tolstoy, the reader powerfully feels the absence of these. "Life itself" moves before him. We are given the life Tolstoy has felt and seen, the people he has known, the motives he has discerned. The pre-eminent qualities of his work are three; these we may well consider in some detail, and as to them critics generally are agreed.

Let us first put sincerity.

There is in Tolstoy's writing, from first to last, one clear purpose of truth telling.

No improbable romance, no artificial situations; only ordinary people, ordinary affairs, ordinary feelings, but all made strong, absorbing as "life itself," by this depth of truth. He is a discoverer of reality.

Let us put next, breadth. The theatre of these novels is nothing smaller than all modern society.

They are Russian, and yet cosmopolitan. The author has "seen all." "We feel that, as they must in life, so all classes of men and women, from emperors to beggars, priests and profligates, the learned and the unlearned, idlers, tradesmen, artists, peasants, rich and poor, move here. And we feel that all this life is, in an especial way, subject to him who describes it. This author sees the life of man as one, and exposes its unity under all bewildering varieties of outward appearance.

And thirdly, let us say insight. Tolstoy is the furthest from those story-tellers

whose automata are only interesting because of the adventures that whirl about and alternately humiliate and glorify their bodies; he has no part with those who give us superior persons, heroines and heroes; his faculty is for divining the deep motives of our own hearts; his people are interesting because we know ourselves in them. Not in the motives we give out to the world, not even in the motives we proclaim to ourselves, but in the real motives, the great currents of desire that sweep us on in these Tolstoy deals. He shows us our basic selves.

I find no point where any of his contemporaries, his opponents, can justly place a finger and say, "This man fails in this or that qualification to be a judge of life." He has, in regard to his later work, been accused of want of exact scholarship and technical philosophical training, "which," say his critics, "are only obtainable, each of them, by a life's study; and even a man of genius who becomes a novelist, must forego these other acquisitions, and remain content to leave untouched the work of scholars and philosophers." In this way "the learned" repudiate his conclusions (really without understanding them), not feeling that they have in Tolstoy a man who is their master, and who well knows what to take of their, the scholars' and schoolmen's, results, for the use of his own larger purpose. Before men of genius all life is subserviently departmentised, and the kings of mind draw from their offices of state, from each department, such truth as their kingdom needs.

Readers and critics in all civilisation have established Tolstoy the novelist in the front rank of his order. Now, it is said among these same readers and critics, that Tolstoy the teacher, the "religionist," has sunk into a fanaticism; is, indeed, a little mad. In proceeding to consider his later developments, we may well keep in mind always the question, "Have we in these teachings and this life the inevitable outcome, the ripe fruit, of great sanity, or the disease and folly of genius? For assuredly, in the case of Tolstoy, it is one or the other.

IV

Inevitably, any exposition of Tolstoy's teaching must follow the course of his life, because of that sincere and consistent development of his mind in his writings already remarked upon. And also, because he always presents his

conclusions as drawn from actual experience, from living practice; no mere theory, speculation, word-weaving.

In My Confession Tolstoy has told of the great change which came over his life as he drew near fifty years of age. He then found himself rich, famous, prosperous in his family, able to choose what friends he would, and in complete health. Amid all this, there grew upon him a new, strange unrest. It was as though he had found out that his life was without meaning. Continually he asked himself, "Why?" and "What after?" It was no light sentiment, but a life-and-death agony of soul upon which he was entered. He feared to live under this sense of the incomprehensibility, the purposelessness, of life. All his former conceptions of life he now saw to be insufficient, empty, for they did not even suggest what is the end of it all, for himself, for all men.

His agony became such that he put ropes and guns out of his way, lest he should at some moment be driven to suicide. He wondered how in the past he could have lived without solving the problem. Surely he must, he considered, in all his reading of ancients and moderns, philosophers and religious teachers, in all his intercourse with his cultured friends, have missed that explanation of life which they surely must have known! Again he read, again he discussed.

But he only saw the more clearly that philosophy and culture had no practical and satisfying answer to the problem; they only confessed its existence, and despaired of it.

"From Solomon to Schopenhauer," they showed life as a thing incomprehensible; on the whole an evil thing; to be endured while one must, and to be met with the effort to get from it as much happiness as possible while it is ours. He found the last state of philosophy and culture to be Pessimism.

There was no "faith," no confidence in life to be gained, sufficient to carry one on through life.

At last he reflected that the philosophers and men of culture people of that circle to which he himself belonged, who assumed (as he himself had done) that all possibility of understanding life lay with their own superior

intelligence and learning were, after all, a very small fraction of humanity. Outside them lay the vast mass of mankind, the labouring folk, "the common people." With a renewed interest in those whom he had loved and studied all his life, Tolstoy again examined the life of the mass, the Russian people. And here, despite labours and miseries, despite ignorance, error and sin, here he found a faith in life.

The peasants are free from the pessimism which rules the cultured; they display a satisfaction in following their seemingly intolerable toils, and they meet death with an ease and confidence, which are not felt by the rich, the comfortable, the cultured. They find something to live for; a current of life that carries them along. Not as an excuse for keeping the labouring poor in labour and poverty, but as a fact of experience, Tolstoy, the deep observer, announces this.

He perceived that there was in this "faith" something of a religious character; something related to his own boyish recollections of the Gospel, and to his life-long secret instinct that there is in the Gospel a superior truth. He perceived that the basis of this "faith" was acceptance of "God," that concept of a Power Who overrules all, which belongs to all religions. Again he associated himself with Orthodoxy, sharing the worship, the sacraments, the observances of the church, with the common people.³

And he envied the unlearned peasants their ability to receive without question the forms and ceremonies with which the Gospel is bound up for them. For himself, he was compelled to discriminate. The injunction, "love one another in unity" he could receive with joy, reason assenting; but the transubstantiation, the Trinity, and so forth, his reason, as formerly, could not rest in. He made his discrimination. The "living faith" in a God, the Father of all, and the duty of loving and serving all men, our brothers, as ourselves, he detached from the mass of Church accretions, finding this to be the pure, essential Christian doctrine. The Churches Greek, Romish, Protestant, Dissenting oppose each other; that is not unity. They countenance war of Christians against Christians; that is not love. He could not be of the Church. And he perceived that all the good he had seen in the life of men, while associated with the simple faith of the Gospel, is yet

outside, indeed opposed by, the Churches.⁴

For "the faith" which lives in the people is that confidence in life which enables them day by day to toil on at the labours by the fruit of which all men live. It is they, the labouring people, who are the servants of all, duly fulfilling (and under the exactions of the non-producing rich trebly fulfilling) the law, which says for all men, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." In this direction, Leo Tolstoy found the light.

V

Tolstoy is his own best biographer, and we shall best follow him onward from this point by reading *What Shall We Do Then?* a book written to answer the question of men and women in positions like Tolstoy's own; the question of people who come to see the truth discovered in *My Confession*. This work is virtually in three parts, dealing respectively with Charity, Property, and Labour.

It appears that as the light dawned, Tolstoy, feeling himself compelled to walk by it, set himself to discover how he, a non-producing rich man, might enter into right relations with those labouring poor upon whom he had so far been a parasite. In Moscow he applied himself to what we in England have learned to call "slumming;" visiting and assisting in all ways the extremely poor, founding a relief society for collecting information and alms, and for distributing the alms. So he attempted to justify himself. He was not satisfied, and came to see the error he was still in by the aid of one Sutaieff, a peasant-preacher who, from being a village merchant, had given himself to a very simple and honest following of the Gospel. In this man's presence, Tolstoy, to gain his opinion, described his own "works of charity." Sutaieff would not approve, and when pressed for his own remedy, told Tolstoy to take into his house two destitute men he himself would take one and with these they should live as brothers, eating, working and speaking together. Tolstoy says he at once saw the truth that same truth expressed thus by John Ruskin: "The mistake of the best men, through generation after generation, has been that great one of thinking to help the poor by almsgiving, and by preaching of patience or of hope, and by every other means, emollient or consolatory, except the one thing which God orders for them, justice." This "justice," Ruskin goes on to say, is: "By the best men

denied in its trial time, by the mass of men hated whenever it appears." And Leo Tolstoy was now to become the preacher of this denied and hated justice.

The failure of "charity" led on to a deeper examination of the relations between rich and poor; to new study of economics, history, philosophy and life.

The result, as shown in the chapters discussing Property, the money-power, is precisely that economic presentment made by Socialists everywhere, but here given in Tolstoy's own way. The rich are in possession of property and the power of government. By exaction of rent, interest, profit and taxes, they take from the labourer all but that "subsistence-wage" which orthodox economists assert to be his miserable final portion. Sometimes even that is taken. The whole process Tolstoy well describes; but a singular value of these chapters is the searching examination of the nature and operation of Money, too long to be adequately dealt with here. Money is shown to be the chain of the labourer's slavery; he must have it, to pay rent and taxes, and to buy what he cannot himself produce. To get it, he must sell his labour or his produce, and by the operation of monopoly and competition his labour and produce are made cheap, and the things he must buy are made dear. For any surplus left him, government takes that away, to spend in official salaries and militarism.

Graphic pictures of these things in the doing Tolstoy gives to us. He shows us the rich family in their summer country residence, settled to a life of pianos and picnics, made possible by an array of well-fed, leisurely domestics. Opposite the house are the sloping fields, dotted with black figures of men and women, old people and little children, who come out to work with the morning sun, and cease with the sunset. All day long, having only black bread to eat and kvass to drink, they sweat and toil, getting in the hay. And see, the hay of last year is being trodden into the earth of the road under the feet of the horses at the door of the great house! So it is, says Tolstoy to the rich, that the starved and slavish toil of these poor is wasted upon your idle luxury.

"Yes," he says, "you have made the poor into a beast to carry you on its back. And the beast carries you, very easily for yourselves, and when it

suffers and groans you say, 'Ah, poor creature, how much we pity you! We would do anything to help you!' And you would," says Tolstoy, "anything except get off its back." That, according to him, is just the duty to themselves, not less than to the labouring poor, which the rich need to perform.

Again, he describes the life of a rich man of his acquaintance, an "enlightened Liberal," quite "able-bodied." This man rises late, eats elaborately, smokes cigarettes, talks "enlightened Liberalism," takes the play or the opera, sups, talks, smokes, sleeps. To provide his cigarettes, young girls in the factories are preparing early death for themselves; to provide his often-changed white linen, an old woman in the side street bends over the ironing-board from morning until night. Let my friend, says Tolstoy, give up what does him harm and kills young girls; let him iron his own shirts while the old woman rests, if he finds the shirts worth doing when done by himself.

How is it that the idle rich justify themselves in thus living on the labour of the poor? By a huge deceit, says Tolstoy, concocted by a false political economy, based upon a perverted philosophy, sanctioned by a venal Church, and enforced by the State's power to kill. That deceit is the current doctrine of the Division of Labour. True, says Tolstoy, it is good that some should plough and others grind; some make bricks, and others build; some make cloth and others coats; and that these workers should exchange what they make. But it is quite another thing to say also, that some should be emperors, kings, presidents, statesmen, property-owners, priests and preachers, organisers of industry, writers and artists, men of science, soldiers and doctors, and so forth. If all the kings, statesmen, priests, preachers, organizers of industry, writers, artists, men of science, soldiers, doctors, were swept out of existence to-morrow, we perfectly well know that the ploughing, grinding, brick-making, building, weaving, tailoring, would go on just as before only with this enormous advantage, that the labourers would be relieved of the burden of supporting in their present colossal luxury all those lives of non-producers. But take away the ploughman, miller, brickmaker, builder, weaver, tailor and king, statesman, priest, preacher, organizer of industry, writer, artist, man of science, soldier, doctor, are left to starve, houseless, unclothed "shown up" in all their

cultivated inability to do anything really needful.

"What!" the "cultured" world has exclaimed at Tolstoy, "do you mean to say that we are not useful to humanity we, the intelligent, the orderers of things?" Precisely that, answers Tolstoy. And he bids these people to take themselves at the valuation put on them by the mass of men, the workers; not at their own deceitful valuation. The whole of their "cultured" society might go, for all the working-people care. If brute-force or want of employment did not compel, would any labouring men give their lives as soldiers and police to preserve the precious "State" we live under? Not a man, it is to be believed. And if there were no soldiers and police to compel, would the people pay taxes? The question is ridiculous; the peasant, the labouring-man everywhere, would only say "Thank God," if he ceased to be drained by the frightful imposts which go in war, officialism and civil lists of kings. And the simplest forms of village labour would be much more productive to the labourer, than work for competitive wages under "organizers of industry" who "organize" so as to sweep the largest part of what other men produce into their own houses and coffers. The workers know that "employers" come between the worker and his work; hence trade-unions and strikes. And priests and preachers? The mass of the workers show their appreciation by not going to church, except under some kind of compulsion, as in Russia. And writers and artists? The mass of the people do not read books or look at pictures; they have no opportunity as a rule; but where libraries or galleries give a scant opportunity, not "the people," but "the cultured" and one workman here and there, use them. And doctors? How much have all the schools of medicine done to alleviate the sufferings of the poor? Live in a village or a "slum," and take note. In effect, nothing.

This pretence of usefulness made by the classes has its "reasons." Once the excuse was, and in great part still is, the "religious" one, namely, that things as they are, are the will of God, and we must not rebel, but endure. This is interpreted to mean that the masses must bear their privation, and the rich may enjoy their idle luxury, for this is just as God intends. But now the latest excuses are philosophic and scientific. Hegelianism, for instance, arrives at the "immanence of God in nature," and easily finds Him in the State-oppression, the Church-hypocrisy, and the Property-robbery all which we

must therefore take in the necessary order of things. Comte and Spencer are also shown by Tolstoy to take the same view in effect; and modern science and philosophy are shown as teaching us to name "evolution" instead of "the Will of God," and to remain content with living a nice moral life, without criticising or rejecting the unreasonable, maleficent order of society in which our lives are moulded.

"What shall we do then?" says Tolstoy. Learn to understand the law of Labour. Begin by living simply, healthily; making small demands on others' labour for house, food, clothing. Follow Socrates; follow Jesus. Proceed by learning to do something useful and doing it; some genuine "bread-labour," to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, do good to the sick and oppressed. Follow Paul's Christ-like injunction to early and real Christians, that they should "follow honest trades for necessary wants, lest they become unfruitful." And for women, let them take their sisterly part in useful work, ceasing to look upon the sex-relation as a means of getting a living, in or out of marriage. If married, let them cease from luxury and vanity, and take their burden of motherhood as a duty to be fulfilled as to God, and not to be avoided by artifice for the sake of pleasure.

"Cease to do evil, learn to do well." This is the message of the book we have considered.

VI

Isaiah and the priests, Socrates and the demagogues, Jesus and the Pharisees, Francis and the cardinals, Tolstoy and the clerics, always it is the same story.

The "public guardians of religion" are the stout enemies of the prophet; and the Holy Office, "to do God service" hands over the "heretic" to the fires lit by the Secular Arm. In *My Religion*, another of those books which may, in their unity, be called his autobiography, Tolstoy has announced what should compel every priest, clergyman, and minister who understands, either to abandon his calling, or to proclaim Tolstoy a dangerous heretic. This announcement is nothing less than a, to our day, new understanding of Christianity; which indeed makes our orthodox Christianity look like nothing so much as Antichrist.

In My Religion we have the account of how Tolstoy recovered the meaning of the Gospel, hidden from him by centuries of ecclesiastical commentary and perversion. At the stage of development described in My Confession, a new light shone upon one after another of the Gospel sayings and teachings.

Tolstoy discovered that Jesus had meant what He said, and had in many instances meant the opposite of what His words have been twisted and obscured into.

Entering upon his researches in a spirit of freest criticism, substantially acquainted with all that scholarship has done upon the Gospels, and prepared to accept only what he could plainly understand, he came to see that if the plain, full meaning of the words of the Gospel be taken, a doctrine of life appears in them, at once simple, non-supernatural, complete, and joyful to every soul in whom dwells the love of goodness.

But a doctrine, how revolutionary to the world's prevalent conception and practice of life! It must not be thought that Tolstoy is by any means alone in his understanding of the doctrine of Jesus.

A host of men in our own day see as he sees; his singularity is only superior clearness, reasonableness, courage, completeness. In comparing him with John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, for instance, one cannot fail to realize this superiority in Tolstoy over men who have so much of his spirit and outlook. Analysing the ground of the repudiations of him, one sees that they are made simply because of this logic and completeness, by men who have neither, and who are afraid of the simple drastic truth.

The discovery, the prophecy of Tolstoy is, then, that men who would follow the truth revealed by Jesus, must wholly accept and live by the basic principles of Jesus; which are: that there is a God, "Who is our Father, giving us life because He loves us; Whose will is that men should love and care for their fellowmen equally with themselves. Believe and do this, and you are a Christian, says Tolstoy; reject this, or equivocate upon it, and you are no Christian. He is logical. If we trust God, we must trust Him wholly, and do nothing that is contrary to His love and truth; but obey conscience utterly, despite all outward difficulties.

If we love our neighbour, we shall show it by treating him, whoever he may

be, just as we should wish to be treated ourselves. Yes, Tolstoy is logical.

He shows how, if men really had faith in God the Father, they would not try to secure their lives by taking part in the present competitive and warlike organization of society, "the kingdom of this world"; but they would "come out of Babylon," live rightly, usefully, and trust God. He shows how, if men really loved their neighbours as themselves, no man could keep his wealth and rest in ease and comfort while another man suffered; there could be no kingship, power, privilege, riches, poverty, among men who loved each other. Love would make a last end of these evils.

To all this "idealism" men accede readily enough.

The pressure of Tolstoy's doctrine, however, comes just where it came with Jesus; namely, in the saying, "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." Men answer, "We cannot live by these principles; that were suicide." Jesus says, "You must; if you would follow me, you must indeed die to the bodily life, must yield yourselves as already dead." It is the Christian necrosis, once more honestly and clearly put to men in our own day, as it was eighteen centuries since, and as it has been many times between. By many methods Tolstoy goes about to prove the point of Jesus. Perhaps his most effective work is the enunciation, in *My Religion*, of those "five points of conduct" enjoined in the Sermon on the Mount, which in themselves involve the whole Christian spirit and life, and are in themselves wholly revolutionary to the existing order of society. They are contained in Matt. v. 21-48,⁵ and are understood and remarked upon by Tolstoy in this spirit: The whole bearing of the teaching is to show men the error of attempting to bring about good order in society by force, by other means than goodwill, reason, truth. So Jesus, point by point, contrasts the present method of laws, enforced by punishments, with His own, the ideal method. His followers are not to follow the old fallacy of law, and use compulsion, but to live rightly themselves, from the inward spirit. For instance, where the law says, Thou shalt not kill, for fear of judgment and punishment, Jesus says, Thou shalt not feel anger, which is the root of murder. Where the law sanctions marriage and allows divorce, Jesus says that he whose lust makes him unfaithful even in desire only, is an adulterer, and when divorce leads to remarriage, it causes adultery. Where the law professes to defend person

and property, and regulate the affairs of individuals in society, Jesus says we must cease from all such means of defence and regulation, and give the other cheek to the smiter, yield our garment to him who sues at law for our coat, go two miles where required to go one, and give and lend freely to those who ask. Where the law says we must, as a sacred duty, fulfil our oaths, pledges, contracts, Jesus says we must enter into no such obligations, but deal in plain Yes and No, as honest men.

Where the law permits, nay encourages us, to defend ourselves against enemies criminals, social outcasts, foreigners, Jesus says, No, you must love them, do them good, as you would do to your friends; just as the Father sends rain and sunshine on good and bad alike.

To understand this teaching as being literally, simply, fully meant by Jesus, is indeed a shock to all orthodoxy. For, says Tolstoy, look what we have done! We have wholly explained away the force of this teaching, and ignorantly call ourselves "Christian," while doing and approving in Christ's very name, the very opposite to what He commands! Not feel anger? We actually commit murder, the ripe fruit of anger, in wholesale fashion, and then imagine that we and the hangmen and soldiers we employ may all together "go to heaven" as "good Christians." Not encourage lust between the sexes? Church and Law alike consecrate and sanction adulteries which cannot be true marriages, for in most cases it is not the man's first union; divorce is established; marriage is a market for daughters, and looked upon (as is prostitution also) as a way of getting a living for women. Abolish all oaths, pledges, contracts? Tsar, queen, lords, legislators, bishops, clergy, ministers, judges, witnesses, police, soldiers, all take oath on coming to office, and take it on the very book which says, "Swear not at all"! Thus we put duty to, we know not what king, country, government in place of duty to our own knowledge of what is good, right and true. And doing that, we proceed to make it our duty to love our enemies? Not in the least; but to gather armies and fleets to murder them, when "our country" calls! And so "fellow-Christians" go to war, and "ministers of God in the name of Christ" and chaplains of regiments and warships in each country, pray that the "Christians" of their own nation may be successful in murdering other children of the same Father! At least, Tolstoy would say to our pretended Christians, at least have the decency to own that you are what you are

heathens, and not Christians. You may think your methods and your reasons for acting as you do, to be very good ones, but remember, Jesus Christ's methods and reasons are just the reverse of yours.

"Blessed are ye poor," Tolstoy understands to be a necessary part of Christ's teaching to His disciples.

"You, who from your principles cannot hold property, can assert no rights of your own, with you," says Jesus, "all is eternally well." From the full meaning, the practical sense, of this, Tolstoy turns not one whit.

And he knows that to-day many people feel that the voice of God, the necessity of their own spirit, calls them to this Christian poverty. He knows of the agony of soul endured by men in power, men under responsibility, men of wealth, and poor labourers who know their work to be useless, base or destructive: agony caused by the knowledge that they are violating the life of their spirit, their true life. Many such have turned to him, saying, "What are we to do? There seems no way of escape." He, in effect, answers simply, "Acknowledge the truth. Do not deceive or excuse yourself. Confess to the world what your conscience and reason tell you. Lose no opportunity to cease to do evil, and learn to do well. Then He Who is Love and Truth will lead you into rightness of life."

VII

And what has been Tolstoy's practical conduct, in response to these principles? Those who are in a position to know can speak of the faithfulness with which he has, at each step taken by his spirit, followed with his body. So soon as he saw the truth and the full implication of Christ's doctrine, he abandoned his property; which his family, not by his desire, but by their own insistence, took over. For this he was called mad by his own family and circle, and that thought spread in the world that held him famous.

On the other hand, it has been said that he took care to provide for his family, and has thus only nominally "given up all." People say, "He still lives in luxury with his family, and all this proves, in his own person, that his doctrine is impossible." The fact is, that he has simply followed the principles he professes. He felt no obligation to force the property from his family, just as he felt no obligation to force his neighbour's property from his neighbour.

It was sufficient that he himself surrendered all property.

He felt no obligation to live apart from his family, but rather to endure conditions he had come to abhor, in order that he might live the Christian life in presence of those whom he had drawn to himself.

There never has been any fear (and there could not be with such a man), of his wanting friends to support him and his family, in case of need, so that there was no temptation of fear to lead him to cling to his former position. For this reason, some say, "Ah, it was easy for Tolstoy to make the sacrifice. But cannot." Such people forget that the Christian life is the necrosis, the dying to live again, for all who enter it. Tolstoy faced death in facing the Russian Church and State. There was, and is, his trial.

When he surrendered his ownership of property, he simplified his already simple life, and step by step became an abstainer from alcohol, a non-smoker, a vegetarian, and his own servant. To repay mankind for what he still took of the produce of other men's labour, he ploughed the fields, did other agricultural labour, and made boots. It is a small item in the opposition to him from the powers-that-be, that, when he put up over his wooden hut the legend "House of Leo Nicolaevitch Tolstoy, Shoemaker," and began business, the authorities ordered the sign down, as being unsuitable for a nobleman, a count, and tending to bring aristocracy and the State generally into disrepute.

He refuses all money-traffic; perceiving, with Shelley, that money is "the mediative sign of selfishness," impossible in that "commerce of good words and works" which is the ideal state of human relations.

Since the change in his conception of life, he has neither desired nor received payment for his writings.

"But," say some, "it is necessary to live, and we must take payment for work done." Tolstoy answers, "I know of no necessity for me to live, but I do know of a necessity for me to utter the truth I perceive, and to give it freely to all men. Its value I do not know, and I am content to do useful (and healthy) work with my hands for my living, and in return, take what men freely give me." "Ah, but," people say again, "that is easy for a man of genius, but we cannot do that." I would again refer to the Russian Government, as a

standing threat against the life of any such reformer as Tolstoy. He braved that threat, made his sacrifice, as all must do.

When Leo Tolstoy began to write in this new spirit, State and Church, confronted with militant Nihilism, thought the revived Gospel of Peace would be a help to them. For some time the authorities rather encouraged the spread of Tolstoy's new books. But presently, they began to see and feel the real effect of the new spirit. Then the censorship began its work; and now, but little of Tolstoy's writing is allowed to be circulated in Russia. Persecution has fallen, not directly on Tolstoy himself, but on his friends.

Ordinary persons found reading the prohibited works are arrested and sent to prison, even to Siberia.

His special friends and co-workers are removed or exiled; two are in England now, another is coming.

The purpose of the authorities is, to isolate him, and make him thus less powerful. They will not touch himself: deeming that to suffer for the truth is precisely the fate Tolstoy might, for truth's sake, most desire. Indeed, just lately he wrote to the Ministry of the Interior, asking why, if they punished those who read his books, they did not deal with himself, their source.

Of his views upon government, there could, from the first, be little mistake. Five years ago, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, removed any possibility of mistake.

There, Tolstoy explained the doctrine of Christ as a new conception of life, which makes love the spring of all human action, and truth the only method of action. From this standpoint he showed how the States, in all their laws and institutions, and the established and propertied Churches with them, rest on a foundation of organised physical force, a basis which is precisely anti-Christian.

The proof of this position as to the Gospel teaching, Tolstoy has worked out at great length in *The Four Gospels Harmonised and Translated*, of which two out of the three volumes exist in English translation. Dealing with the Greek text, and making a new translation of his own, he has here been accused of insufficient scholarship, violence to the Greek, and other

deficiencies, the sum of which is only trifling, and makes not at all substantially against his understanding of the Gospel. Notwithstanding all he has written and done, all these years, in all civilization there has not yet appeared a serious opposing critic of Tolstoy. Why is this? Cannot our European Churches and Universities provide us a man who will truly state and truly refute the teaching which is turning from them the minds of the most spiritual and most intelligent men everywhere? "Why are we given only the feeble "magazines" of such men as Canon Farrar or a casual secularist? It is, one must believe, that each profounder mind feels that there is no effective refutation.

I have said little or nothing of such work of Tolstoy's earlier period as his treatment of the physiology of war, in *War and Peace*, or the essay *Power and Liberty*, or the later and highly important philosophical work, *Life*. It must suffice to say, that while his work is always philosophical in the sense of being true to fact and reason, he has written in several quite different styles, terms and methods, obviously aiming to state his position by every possible means, "if by any means he might win some." It is not wise to suppose that any known "school of thought," or tradition, or fashion of argument or language, has vital secrets unknown to this man, grown old in search into such matters. Indeed, the work of his later years has included the production in Russian of simple treatises conveying the essential doctrine of teachers so remote from us in place and time as Lao-tze, Mentzius, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Diogenes, Francis of Assisi.

I have not spoken of the stories of Tolstoy's later years. Simple, strong, beautiful in every aspect of goodness, they show forth the one spirit. He himself is right in laying little stress on these, however, for they serve little purpose but to rouse emotion, soon to pass. Not mere emotion, but the illumination of emotion by reason, is our need; and Tolstoy's power is to fulfil this need. And yet one of these stories, *Work While Ye Have the Light*, is most effective both in wakening emotion and in directing it by reason. It is a tale of the second century, and in its incidents and discussions, gives an account of primitive Christian life and thought which powerfully impresses one as necessarily true in spirit and form.

A word must be said about *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Few people read books, or

so many would not have missed the teaching of this one. No doubt the strong, tragic incidents of the story of jealousy and murder overshadow the reasoned statements and conclusion it conveys, and leave superficial minds with an impression of horror, as though all that is holy had been dragged in the mud, rather than with the conclusion that only one way of escape from the temptations and disasters of sex is open to mankind: the way, namely, of purity of thought and life. This, chastity as an ideal, is the substance and the sum of Tolstoy's mind on the sex-relation. Mainly for his expositions of "Non-resistance" and "Chastity," Tolstoy has earned the opposition of many who suffer from want of comprehension of that which, and him whom, they condemn.

VIII

What, then, is this "faith" of Leo Tolstoy? His latest setting-forth of it is in *The Gospel in Brief*.

It is not a superstition, but a reasoned conviction as to the nature and possibilities of human life.

This faith has existed always. The world's great teachers have all held it, and have been great by teaching and living it. A belief in a Supreme Power of Righteousness; a belief that welfare lies in doing only Righteousness; a belief that life consists not in the Body but in the Spirit; that the Righteous Spirit is eternal; and that the Nature of the Spirit is at variance with the Nature of the Body, which would draw it, by power of needs and appetites, into unrighteousness.

That is all.

"Live to the Spirit, die to the body" the necrosis of the Gospel.

Here, in our day once more, is a widely-heard man who believes this, and so lives. He is not alone. Thousands of his obscure countrymen who, in seclusion from the world, have held the same faith for generations, are being at this time slain by the Government of "Holy Russia." And he, near the end of his bodily life, speaks across the continents the Truth for which martyrs, ancient and modern, have died and are dying.

He is called a "pessimist"! He who tells us that the world's ice is breaking,

for the Sun of Righteousness is gathering power, as does the sun in spring; he who waits his end in peace and tranquillity, though become an alien to his former friends and condition, deprived by exile of his spiritual friends, and wholly obnoxious to a terrorist government and a church whose pretensions and deeds he has exposed to the utmost. No, he is no pessimist; rather let us call him the supreme optimist. Such an optimist as Jesus, who said, in view of the cross, "My joy is fulfilled." The greatness of Tolstoy is, that he has recognised a greater than himself, namely, the Jesus in the Gospel. How differently from Strauss or Renan has Tolstoy conceived that teacher, "mild and sweetly reasonable," yet the destroyer of priesthood and kingship! No "second person of the Trinity," but a living "Son of God"; no miraculously-born prodigy, but "a man like unto ourselves," though of holy and just life; not an innocent bearing the punishment of the guilty, but "the holy one and the just," slain as a heretic and a rebel by our ignorant sin, this is the man Christ Jesus, as seen by Tolstoy. This Jesus is the arch-opponent of the "Social System" that prevailed in His day, and prevails in ours. He cares nothing for our vested interests, ancient institutions, venerable traditions, art and culture of centuries.

"Sweep all away," He would say, "and begin again from the root. The property, the institutions, traditions, art and culture, of your Society are poisoned at the root. You have made 'getting,' and not 'giving' the maxim of your whole economy. Repent, enter the kingdom of heaven, which is ready to your hand; and you shall find, not the parody of good which is the infrequent best your Society possesses, not riches extorted from poverty, not institutions which perpetuate oppression and delusion in the names of justice and religion, not traditions which make vain the truth, the law, of God, not art and culture which minister to idleness and debauchery, not these, but the commonwealth of the kingdom of heaven on earth, the freedom and enlightenment which truth brings, the beauty of reasonable labour and the 'mildness and sweet reasonableness' which are the art and culture of the kingdom of heaven, all these you shall find as the sincere fruit of a tree of life, healthy at the root. And you who are now voices crying in the wilderness, who must cast your lives into the scale against the leaden iniquity of the times, remember that you truly perish, not in withstanding the iniquity, but in submitting to it. Die, that you may live."

Such is the message of Jesus, repeated by Tolstoy; a message for all men. Yet, strange! there are, as we have seen, those in England who tell us that Tolstoy's method and example are for Russia more particularly, where they have military conscription and no franchise; and while Tolstoy is very true, very heroic, for Russia, he has no meaning for England! These people have not reflected upon what I have already pointed out, namely, that among all modern societies, states, the differences are superficial only; all equally rest on that same basis of organised violence, rights of property, war, competition, which Jesus discovered and opposed utterly with His life and His death, in the old Roman and Jewish world. John in Patmos heard the voice saying against Babylon, "Come out of her, my people, lest ye become partakers of her iniquities, and lest her plagues come upon you." And Tolstoy, bidding men return to, and have faith in, the Spirit of Love which works by Truth, is again proclaiming our civilization to be the prophetic Babylon, from which we must come out, and enter into newness of life. Peace, goodwill, truth spoken in love, these must draw those who have the spirit of Christ into true social relations, drawing them out of their present relations in society. In doing this there is a necrosis for Englishmen not less than for Russians.

The faith of Tolstoy reasons thus. Either our life proceeds from Nothing, or from a Power of Evil, or from a Power of Good. It is inconceivable that Something has come from Nothing; but for the man who so thinks, there is only, for him, to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow he dies. If such a life satisfies a man, let him take it, but of him the Spirit of Life says, "Thou fool!" That we proceed from a Power of Evil is the world's actual faith and orthodoxy. For do we not say, "The Power that made us, has put us where we are COMPELLED to do evil; to avoid the evils of pain and death, we must (if only a little) compete, fight, take part in, compromise with, wrong"? This is only to say that the Life which gives us our Life, the Reason, reflected in our Reason, the Love that inspires our Love, is a cheat, a mocker. Indeed, we are Devil-worshippers; believing that the most dangerous thing in life is Love, and the most unreasonable, Truth. So we say of Tolstoy, who surrenders to these, "Very fine and heroic; the man is a saint, a prophet; but a little mad, and not for us." We ask for his proof of what he teaches, just as Jesus was asked for His authority. And the reply can only be.

"Be good, and you will do good; be good and do good, and you will get good full measure, pressed down, running over. Do not fear for your lives; have faith in the Power of Good, and He will prove Himself to you."

The entrance to the good life is strait and narrow; few there be that find it. But those few are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city, the society, set on a hill. Emperors and kings, statesmen and soldiers, priests and pedants, leaders and masters, think the world holds together by them; in truth, they are the world's incubus, the preventers of peace, the perversion of wisdom, the darkening of light. Our prophets, our saviours, are the men of conscience and courage, who die to the body, and live to the Spirit, in which is the only true, reasonable, enduring life; and who by word and example inspire mankind with man's own, already born, growing, proper soul, the new nature of the Sons of God. Of these prophets and saviours, by proof plain in the lives of many at this moment, Leo Tolstoy is one.

John C. Kenworthy

Notes

[←1]

The word must be freed from misunderstanding. It stands for no other idea than its Greek meaning of "no government." It is not used by Anarchists to mean "no order." Anarchism looks to a better order of society which is to arise with freedom from force-government. That a few professed Anarchists advocate violent rebellion, bombs and assassination, is true; but that is no part of the idea which creates the movement. It only proves how bitter is the hatred of the existing social system.

[←2]

The Editor of this volume will perhaps permit me to refer those who desire some more personal account of the Tolstoy of the present, to a pamphlet entitled A Pilgrimage to Tolstoy, containing six letters written to the The New Age nearly two years ago. The publishers are the Brotherhood Publishing Co.

[←3]

In Russia there is a certain compulsion upon the peasants to 'attend Church.'

[←4]

It is to be emphasised that Tolstoy's attitude towards the Russian Church is equally (and necessarily) his attitude towards all so-called "Christian" Churches, these being at one with the existing social system.

[←5]

The English Revised Version should be consulted by the reader.